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CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

27

REVELATIONS

177
DEC

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

See, to me, drawing *Cerebus* is like being a major league baseball team. You play one hundred and sixty-two games in six months: virtually every day. If I get two pages a day done, that's a win. If I get a page and a half done, that's a one-run game; it could go either way, a win or a loss. A page a day and you're going to need some luck to pull it out; you have to get some unearned runs, the other team has to make some errors. Less than a page a day and you need a miracle to pull it out. You're stranding runners in scoring position, walking the lead-off hitter, blowing comfortable leads. A hundred and sixty-two games in six months. Every day is a new game. Doesn't matter if you swept the last four-game series; if you aren't focussed you can get swept in the next series by a team that's twelve games out of first in the middle of July. You can have the best self-published title in the world, but if you go on a fifteen-day losing streak (less than a page a day) your chances of ending up in first place at the end of September are twofold: slim and nil. Picture the kind of focus that it takes to be in peak physical and mental condition every day for six months. Win or lose, today's game is today's game. You shrug off the losses (all right, I only got one panel inked yesterday. Today I'll do two pages) and the wins (I got almost three pages done yesterday and today my productivity sucks. Everyone and everything get the fuck out of my way; I'm going to get two pages done if I have to work until two in the morning). Nothing exists but today's game.

★★★★★★★★★★

See, to me, drawing and writing *Cerebus* is the same as sleeping. Sometimes you can sleep and sometimes you can't. When you have insomnia (I think) you are basically afraid to sleep. You don't want to enter Morpheus' realm because you had a dream last night that you've forgotten that told you some very unpleasant truths about yourself. You are exhausted: you *want* to sleep. Sleeping is one of the most natural things in the world for you, all things being equal. To accomplish it, all that is required is getting out of your own way and it happens all by itself. But suddenly the part of your brain that wants to sleep is dominated by the part that wants to think. All that is going around in your head is useless 'real' world stuff: your relationship, your ex-relationship, family stuff, disturbing conversations you've had with people whose opinion you don't respect. You go in to work and the drawing board seems to be at the wrong end of the telescope. You find a hundred excuses not to work instead of kicking those impediments out the door and telling them to come back later . . . much later. It is the same thing. The part of your brain that wants to write and draw is dominated by the part that wants to do something (*any*thing) else. Writing and drawing requires going inside yourself to your own little world that no one can enter except you. Every friend and loved one that you have is either consciously or unconsciously jealous of that fact and consciously or unconsciously they labour to keep you away from it. Other writers and artists are the worst. If they're afraid to work that day, they will usually try to find another writer or artist (either in person or by phone) to share their misery, their fear of going to their own secret place. 'Hey, if I can't go to my secret place, you can't either'. Stop feeling guilty about your secret place, stop feeling guilty that others can't go there with you. The more time you spend there, the happier you're going to be. Everyone enjoys a good night's sleep and dreaming. As a writer and/or artist, you get to sleep and dream, and then do basically the same thing for a living. Unplug the phone, put a 'do not disturb' sign on the door and then lock it. Then vanish into your secret place, your private world. Dream. Dream.

★★★★★★★★★★

Cerebus No. 43 (June 1992) — Aardvark Vanaheim — Well, it's almost fifteen years since I bought the first issue of *Cerebus*. 'High Society' (or should that be 'Slow Society') lurches to a conclusion. Checking my files, I find that this is the third issue to come out this year of this ostensibly 'monthly' title. Once again we are treated to a Note From Everyone's Ex-Husband/Ex-Boyfriend. Let's see, there was the year off after his marriage to 'recover his bearings', the plea for subscriptions when his bank account (Old Dave Hubbard went to the Cupboard . . .) vanished (couldn't be all those trips to sunny climes with the Bimbo du Jour, could it? Nah). Don't get me wrong. I like *Cerebus*. I'd even go out on a limb and say I LOVE *Cerebus*. If he ever gets to 'Church & State' (which at this rate should be around 1996) I'm sure I'll LOVE that as well. I just have the awful feeling that someone told Sim to 'get a life' and he, unfortunately, is taking them at their word. I wish him well with his forthcoming marriage but it would be nice to see issue one hundred before I'm old and gray. Two and a half stars. Davey, we hardly knew ye.

CEREBUS

NO. 177 DECEMBER 1993

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

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Victor Reid awoke, his throat parched and waves of pain rolling listlessly through the interior of his skull, dashing themselves against the craggy shoreline behind his eyes, a tidal phenomenon which seemed in some way connected to the gravitational force exerted by the leaden mass which had replaced his stomach in the night. One eyelid slid warily aloft against the resistant and vaguely adhesive film which coated its throbbing underside. Some inches away sat one of Victor's wineglasses, faint lip-prints visible at the rim, half filled with pinkish, translucent wine in which floated a single cigarette end, its paper filter captured in the process of unravelling, weeping tobacco-coloured tendrils which curled comfortably into a slightly darker and malignant pool at the point where the stem of the glass met its bowl.

Milieu's.

A single image of Milieu's face, soft and inscrutable, swam before him, tears starting down her cheeks, even as her lips parted and a shuddering intake of breath signalled . . .

As if to emphasize his recollection, a part of the blackened end of the cigarette detached itself and drifted languidly downward through the stagnant pool of Pink Infidel, jostling the sickly yellow tendrils and causing them to adopt newer and (if such a thing were possible) even uglier formations.

Raising himself up on one elbow, he attempted to familiarize himself with his surroundings. After a slow, bleary-eyed assessment of the furnishings in his immediate vicinity, he concluded that he had fallen asleep on the sofa in his living room. His new wine-coloured velvet jacket (du Remarque of Lower Felda) was still buttoned over his silk waistcoat (Renard Serrea) and his crisp white cotton shirt (Palais de Dieu). His gold-and-red silk tie (Holcombe and Sons, Iest) retained Victor's distinctive Unshib Knot. There was a dull ache at the top of his breastbone where his ruby stickpin (Garland Brothers, Iest) had very nearly broken through the skin as he slept. From the waist down, he was nude.

The white notebook.

His heart leapt within him. Had that really all just happened yesterday? His stomach lurched at the impertinence of the unexpected pulmonary response which, in its turn, provoked a painful escalation of the tidal activity in his brain. Even as the timpani players in his eardrums took this as a signal to exert themselves *a fortissimo* and translucent curtains of red gauze swam across his vision, Victor reached for the small notebook with trembling hands and began flipping through it. Yes. It was all here. Some part of him felt inexplicable relief at this; it was as if he knew he deserved punishment for his half-remembered behaviour of the previous evening (what was it young Justine had called it? Chemical remorse). And yet the notebook was still here, filled with Milieu's distinctive, looping characters. Had Victor been Tarim or Terim, the book would have vanished like a bad dream upon awakening. Standing too quickly, he barked his shin against the sharp corner of the mahogany coffee table. His shouted expletive introduced a new player to his orchestra; a large brass gong many feet in diameter struck with an unpadded hammer. He limped painfully in the direction of the bathroom in time with his newly expanded percussion section.

As he poured boiling water into the bath he had drawn for himself, his conscious mind began the ignominious task of attempting to prod and pierce the thin membrane which partitioned yesterday's activities from his memory. Past experience told Victor that he could expect only fragmentary rewards for his trouble, beginning with his last sequentially uninterrupted recollection and pressing on from there through bog, swamp and bramble until he reached the point where impenetrable jungle would block any further progress.

Why was it, Victor wondered, as he eased himself into the bath, the steaming waters rising to the level of his chin (a signal for the timpani players to redouble their efforts), why was it that he always . . . *did* this to himself just when he was the most exhilarated by his life and his work. He regarded his belly, which rose from the gently lolling waters, his navel at its geographic center, like some flesh-coloured and extinct volcano. He remembered when it had been a mere atoll. Of late it had grown to be a South Sea island of considerable size, capable of sustaining, Victor imagined, a population of some hundreds of natives with his extinct volcano/navel as a tourist attraction, rising majestically on the horizon and visible from many miles in all directions. Soon, if Victor did not mend his gourmand ways, he would have a full-blown island republic to contend with. Angry red striations bisected the southernmost facing of the tourist attraction in question with the distinctive pattern of his wide leather belt (Holcombe and Sons, Iest), although even

these were beginning to vanish from his sight over the rising promontory. He scratched listlessly at them, and the burgeoning island republic swayed in response, like a large dog being scratched behind the ear.

Victor closed his eyes.

Cerebus had ascended.

Milieu had arrived, mid-afternoon, breathless, her eyes gleaming. His housekeeper (Victor winced as he recalled that this was her day off. What if she had walked in and found him . . . found him . . .) had admitted her, and she had flown up the stairs, waving the white notebook and laughing like a madwoman. When she had managed to catch her breath, she had related a chance meeting in a pub the previous night. A friend of a friend had introduced her to a certain Mr. Bruno, an enthusiast of camera obscura, lenscrafting and the related fields. It seemed that Mr. Bruno, on the night that the 'illusion tower' had grown (a year before? two?) to a height never previously recorded, had been experimenting with a tube he had devised of lenses arranged in sequence (a tube he was at great pains to keep secret from the Church, for such contrivances had led more than one of his fellow aficionados to be excommunicated . . . and worse). The function of these lenses was to bring objects closer to the observer, through magnification, much in the way that the camera obscura projects a distant image onto a white surface. On the night in question, Mr. Bruno had been observing the moon through this tube of his and had been surprised to notice that some large object had interposed itself, which at first he had supposed to be a branch or a tree trunk of some kind. Having determined that that was not the case, he had been amazed to note that the object was composed of carved faces or heads and, further, was receding from view at a perfectly astonishing speed. It grew smaller and smaller, becoming little more than an oblong shape against the face of the celestial body, then a mere speck and, finally, vanished from view altogether. It was not until word of the vanishing 'illusion tower' had reached him some months later that he made the connection between the two dates (carefully checking even the time of day in a logbook of his observations). He had invited Milieu to his apartments to look through the tube herself, and she assured Victor that the device worked precisely in the manner described. She had transcribed the entirety of her conversation with Mr. Bruno into her white notebook and, having promised his real name would not be divulged, had extracted his permission (in writing!) to include his observations in Victor's book.

Victor had been stunned.

When at last he recovered his powers of speech, he had babbled for some time about the implications of this piece of intelligence, in a series of disconnected sentences which stumbled and bounced in, over and around each other like so many puppies negotiating a playground slide. Through it all Milieu perched on the edge of her chair, grinning and laughing, her head bobbing so enthusiastically that her long blonde hair leapt and danced about her head and shoulders like a separate being entirely. And then they were both on their feet, their hands clasped, whirling in a circle like schoolchildren, their hysterical laughter and shouts attracting the attentions of Victor's housekeeper, who warily poked her head around the corner of the study's doorway, whereupon she too had been swept up into the merry dance, laughing through the sheer infectious joy of it all (but inwardly mindful of her mother's words regarding her employer: that she should exercise great caution and watchfulness because 'all writers are insane. At the first sign of mischief, run away as fast as you can and don't look back.').

At last the hilarity had subsided and Victor had scrawled a note to Karen Potts, the Vertigo Horse editor who had been assigned to him, begging her forgiveness but postponing their first meeting yet again, this time because of a breakthrough in his research, which Victor was certain (and here he smiled as he wrote) would make *Ascension* the best-selling series of reads in the history of the medium. He pictured the stir that such an assertion was sure to create in the Vertigo Horse offices as he bade his housekeeper to summon a messenger.

He and Milieu sat beaming at one another, and Victor ventured the opinion that there was really nothing for it, was there, but that they go somewhere to celebrate. 'Comme tu veux,' Milieu had replied, and Victor told her to go home and put on her best dress. After she left, Victor began sorting through the assortment of fashionable and expensive clothing he had acquired in recent weeks, merrily humming and singing several of his favourite songs.

L'Hermitage it was called.

A restaurant trafficking exclusively in Feldan *Provençal cuisine,* Victor had seen mention of

it in one of the better restaurant guides and had noted that the owner/chef was a former chef to the monarch of one of the smaller T'capmin Kingdoms. The decor was perfunctory at best, which had served to dampen Victor's mood, slightly, on their arrival. The food, however, was exquisite. Victor ordered a bottle of very expensive Feldan champagne and toasted, as was his habit, 'to crime'. He chattered amiably on every subject under the sun, poured forth a litany of his plans and dreams and aspirations. Mr. Bruno was the key he had been looking for. With the revelation implied by this small piece of research, Victor had in his grasp the leverage he needed to fulfill his longest held and most secret hope: he would publish a read which contained no illustrations. None. He waxed poetic on the subject. It was time for literature to mature beyond pictures and stand or fall on its own merits. Illustrations were just confusing; they seldom, if ever, pertained to the text and divided the reader's attentions, inhibiting their inner vision. Without pictures, *Ascension* would be the first vehicle in the history of the reads medium that would allow the writer to involve his audience in the story alone. Without a pictorial crutch, the reader would involve himself more fully in the story, lose his preconceptions as to the content and give himself (or herself, Victor added in the politically correct manner) to the writer's control. Oh, yes, Victor would weave tapestries with his words, his description of the tower, breaking off from its base in a thundering and explosive convulsion, hurling itself skyward, into the heavens, bearing the diminutive figure of the tiny populist pope aloft, there to rendezvous with the Living Goddess, would be . . .

Or God, he thought.

Victor had paused, then. A sudden feeling of uncertainty overtook him, familiar territory for a writer. He gazed at the tabletop — as if it were an uncompleted paragraph — for several moments. The waiter reappeared, and Victor ordered another bottle of champagne.

Milieu asked him about his family, cautiously. She had broached the topic several times before and had noted that on each occasion the subject had abruptly changed his disposition (Milieu was the first of the many women in Victor's life to tell him that his eyes changed colour in response to his mood; it was an observation he found unsettling). Now, however, in light of the enormous success he felt looming before him, no subject could take the wind out of his sails. Not tonight. And so he answered all of her questions about his father, his mother and his sister, his aunt and uncle who were childless, his other aunt and uncle and his female cousin (the only member of the family who was younger than Victor), his grandmother, confined to a nursing home, his other grandmother (recently widowed), his great aunt who deplored his status as an unrepentant divorcé at peace with his solitary existence (who, Victor told Milieu, had turned to him at one memorable Winters Eve Holiday and had said, venomously, 'So, you're a free man.' 'Well,' Victor had replied, 'I'm not free, but I'm reasonable.'). With the exception of his cousin, Tracy, Victor was the baby of the family and the clown, two roles which he found more and more confining as the years went by.

They had no interest in his work. The few relations who had attempted to read him had found his work impenetrable and their lack of comprehension frustrating. His recent financial success had simply imposed another barrier, which was to be expected, Victor supposed. His sister, an ardent Kevillist, was caught between ferocious competitiveness with him and a woman's natural desire to be close to her relations. She had accused Victor of 'talking too much' some years before, and so, now, in her infrequent company, Victor held his tongue and contented himself with listening to her ceaseless monologues on the subject of her trials, tribulations and triumphs in a male-dominated world.

Mercifully, at that point, the waiter brought the main course, and Milieu filed her conversational trophies away in the treasured recesses of the female mind where such things are kept.

Victor now endeavoured to converse in Lower Feldan. It was a language he could read to a very small degree, write even less well and understand, in conversation, not at all. Or so he supposed. Milieu confined herself to simple, declarative sentences, and as the evening went on Victor found himself remembering a good deal more of his Feldan *de l'école* than he had imagined possible.

Where had it gone wrong? he wondered, ducking his head below the surface of his bath.

He had ordered a third bottle of champagne. Yes. It was at that point that the undergrowth of inebriation began to grow wild, stifling, choking off rational thought. Still, everything had been splendid. They had had a *soufflé* for dessert, which had been a little too brown around the edges. Not quite overcooked but sufficient to make it pastry-like instead of 'air and eggs, devoid of texture' (who was it that said that? Victor forgot). And as they were finishing the champagne, a small savoury arrived, compliments of the management,

containing the season's first raspberries. He didn't remember leaving *L'Hermitage*. He had been in a romantic mood — or lustful, anyway, which was Victor's nearest approximation of romance since the third debacle with Justine. Milieu understood the rules. Sex, conversation and companionship were the only cards he threw in the game of romance these days. 'Everything with you is just foreplay,' Kallin had said to him once, long ago. If his final Rest was in a cemetery of female devising, he could think of no more suitable an epitaph for his headstone: 'Here lies Victor Reid. Everything to him was just foreplay.'

Karen Potts' note.

He started up so violently that a great deal of bathwater hurled itself onto the turquoise tiles. His heart pounded; the waters reared back against him and then retreated, reared against him and retreated. The pendulum-like contest between kinetic and potential energy exhausted itself gradually, and then all was sufficiently still that the sound of water dripping from his forelocks seemed to echo loudly in the small room.

Karen Potts' note.

Through the dark and overgrown vines of alcohol-assisted amnesia it swam up towards him. He fought the urge to leap from the bath in pursuit of it. It would still be crumpled into a small ball in the corner, next to the marble statue of the Goddess in her Lady of Bounty aspect (the irony was not lost on Victor as he recalled this). But there was no need. The hated words burned like fire in the forefront of his mind. As he closed his eyes and eased himself back into his bath, he could see them as clearly as if they had been written across the sky in vermillion . . . no, scarlet . . . letters.

> Victor:
> Impossible to reschedule. Please be here by mid-afternoon or remit advance payment in full by return post.
>
> Sincerely, Mrs. Potts

He felt the rage well up in him again. The rage, fueled by a prodigious quantity of alcohol. He had poured himself a large cognac on their arrival and a Pink Infidel for Milieu. They had been chatting amiably when he had spotted the pink (pink!) envelope on the small table in the entryway. He had torn open the envelope and read the note through blurred vision. And the rage had come upon him.

Enter Rotsieve, the anti-Victor.

He couldn't remember a thing of what he had said, of course, but he could guess. Rotsieve and Victor were two sides of the same coin. Victor studied Kevillism and Cirinism, accommodating himself to the new reality of female ascendancy in its dual (contradictory) forms and delighting in weaving fictions which punctured the pretensions of the 'unfairer sex' (*Lady Hortense's Conundrum*, Victor Reid, Shadow Press, 1407) and which played Hob with their ill-considered rhetoric and platitudinous mumbo jumbo. There were women of good intellect with whom he enjoyed the cut-and-thrust of forensic debate on the subject (Milieu was one). Most of these had become aware, in recent days and to varying degrees, that the homogenization of gender was not the land of milk and honey that it purported to be. Men had become weak and pliant to the point of flaccidity, sycophantic in their adoration. Few were the women of Victor's acquaintance the paths of whose young lives were not strewn with the wreckage and debris of male hearts relentlessly thrown over the transom at the locked door of their kind indifference. As it became apparent to good women with good minds that much of this trouble must (in no small measure) be debited to the hitherto undebited account of Kevillist infallibility, Victor had become more sympathetic to the female plight. He documented, now, their genuine anxiety and turned a deaf ear to the earnest nonsense of the prattling rhetoric-mongers in the same way that he took no serious notice of Feldwar Supremacists or Sepra First ideologues.

Rotsieve, as the saying goes, was a different kettle of fish entirely.

How eloquent he must have been. Rotsieve, in self-righteous and moral dudgeon, was capable of dictating the first dozen chapters of a definitive tract on misogyny without taking a breath; he was venomous and poetic, vicious and lyrical in his protracted monologues. No female acquaintance, public figure or blood relation escaped indictment. To Rotsieve there were no individual women; they were all expressions and permutations of a solitary and monolithic malignancy. He was bigoted, rhetorical, narrowly focussed, dismissive of contrary argument (however well-reasoned), merciless, tyrannical and . . .

And Milieu had born the full brunt of his tirade. To Rotsieve, she was one of Them: no more and no less. He had retreated into himself to warm his hands at the fire of his indignation: 'Victor', as if he were a recalcitrant schoolboy; 'Mrs. Potts' his vainglorious mediocrity of a schoolmarm. The wisk broom of his outrage swept the astonished (and thoroughly inebriated) Milieu onto the dust-heap of his irreducible gender prejudice. 'Toutes les femmes,' he remembered snarling, in some context or other, mere inches from

her face. He winced at the fragment of memory. How long had he gone on? There was no telling. He remembered pausing only once, when she picked up the white notebook. 'What are you doing with *that?*' he had snapped, his voice predatory, animalistic. She had looked up at him then, and he had seen the tears, her lips trembling and slightly parted. He heard the shuddering intake of breath which signalled . . .

But she had recovered herself and, even through the crimson mist of his anger, he could see the prodigious inner strength and resource that that had required. She had dropped the notebook onto the coffee table, lightly, so that it made almost no sound.

'You're welcome,' she said quietly, without irony, without anger, without bitterness. She dropped the last of her cigarette into the dregs of her wine. She then took up her coat and her purse, and she left, shutting the door so that it, too, made little or no sound.

Victor rose from his bath and began drying himself. He had to get ready if he was to be on time for his meeting with Karen Potts.

In the back of the cab, Victor shut his eyes and tried to recover some of the exhilaration of the previous day. How confident he had been then of his own success. Now, he was afraid, though he scarcely admitted this, even to himself. 'Remit advance payment in full.' How much was left? He scarcely knew. His bank statements, bills and letters from the accounting firm lay in careless disorder in the middle drawer of his desk. What were such trivial matters to one such as himself — renowned author, lion of the literary world? He was, after all, THE Victor Reid, wasn't he? And he was wealthy. His contract was one of the largest, if not THE largest, ever signed. He slid upright in his seat and drew in a great breath through his nostrils, as befitted a Lord of the Printed Page. The effort started well but grew ragged at the end, and Victor shuddered, spoiling the effect he had intended for himself. He slumped resignedly forward. His hands were damp, and the folder which held an encapsulation of his (Milieu's) new research was now puckered in the shape of his palm. He put it down on the seat beside him and wiped his hands on his pant legs. The cab driver informed him that they had arrived at his destination. Alighting on the sidewalk, he looked up at the sign above the massive oaken doors. The concentric rings around the silhouette of the horse's head looked to Victor like repeated images of a hangman's noose, closing tighter and tighter.

He gave his name to the receptionist and told her he was here to see Karen Potts. She asked him to repeat his name (which he did), then asked him to spell it (which he did). Was Mrs. Potts expecting him? Victor had a sudden mental image of a wooden rack in a dungeon lit by wavering torches and a massive woman in a black hood holding implements of wrought iron over a smouldering hearth. Oh, yes, Victor replied. Just one moment, she said pleasantly and disappeared behind a plain wooden door with a pane of frosted glass. Victor sat uneasily on the edge of a chair, trying to look alert and productive. Then he sat back and crossed his legs, trying to look relaxed, but amenable and interested. Then he put his arm along the back of the chair, swiftly removing it lest his posture be misconstrued as laziness. The receptionist returned and he snapped forward in what he hoped was an attitude of eagerness and youthful vigor. Mrs. Potts is very busy, but she would like you to wait, she informed him. Ah, wonderful, he replied, nodding vigorously. The receptionist looked at him strangely. So, by way of clarification, he added, if she's busy then things must be going very well here. The receptionist smiled professionally, and Victor grinned like a politician facing certain defeat in an important by-election.

The afternoon seemed interminable. People came and went through the door with the frosted glass, stopping every once in a while to ask the receptionist to send something by messenger or to drop off various packages and memos. A casually dressed young fellow came in to inquire about Vertigo Horse's submission guidelines. Without looking up, the receptionist passed him a few sheets of paper, folded, with the distinctive logo printed on one side. The fellow unfolded the sheets and began to read them. I'm sorry, the receptionist said, pleasantly (but firmly), do you have an appointment with anyone? He stammered and, bowing his head (slightly, three times), he backed out of the door and closed it, cutting off his own apology in mid-sentence.

'You must get a lot of that,' said Victor, nodding in the direction of the closed door. Her professional smile flared briefly, without warmth. Victor nodded agreement to himself and earnestly examined the painting on the far wall, as if discovering it for the first time.

After a couple of hours, Victor's legs and back began to ache and, without thinking, he stood up. The receptionist looked up from her work without moving her head, her pen held lightly just above the paper. It was as if the curtains had parted and Victor stood in the center of a stage, a full house anticipating his first scene with indifferent curiosity. He considered stretching or yawning, but his inner voice cautioned him against appearing either lazy, or tired, or impatient, or indifferent or any combination thereof. The moment seemed to stretch into eternity, their eyes locked together, sharing between them the receptionist's unspoken question. At last, Victor put his hand over his mouth and coughed, quietly, before resuming his seat. Again, the landscape opposite him seized hold of his attention, new depths of purpose and undiscovered subtleties of execution suddenly revealing themselves. He stole a furtive glance in the direction of the receptionist, out of the corner of his eye, and saw, to his great relief, that she was once more at work and entirely ignorant of his very existence.

A distant bell rang twice, and the receptionist stood and walked back through the frosted glass door. When she returned, several minutes later, she had donned her coat and was rummaging through her purse. Victor peered at the landscape once more, raising his eyebrows as if remarking to himself on still and yet another of the *maitre's* seemingly infinite capacity for chromatic legerdemain.

'I'm afraid Mrs. Potts won't be able to see you today,' the receptionist informed him.

'Mmm?' said Victor, tearing his eyes reluctantly from what could easily have been one of the two or three greatest examples of an oil landscape he had seen in his lifetime. The receptionist smiled as if indulging a small child caught in a transparent fib.

'She expects you back here first thing in the morning,' she said. 'We open at 8:30.'

'Well, I'll see you then,' said Victor, grinning. The receptionist, having concluded her working day, felt no compulsion to smile on her own time and departed without another word.

Victor returned home feeling completely drained of all his energy and essence. It was a husk, a shell of the former Victor who paid the cab driver — a shell, a husk of the former Victor who stood at the curb and counted his change to the last coin. The driver raked him with a disdainful look as he realized that no gratuity was forthcoming. With a little practice, Victor thought, ruefully, you might one day become a receptionist in a large publishing house, my good man.

Shuffling across the threshold, Victor's foot struck a small white envelope which skittered away from him across the parquet flooring. He stooped to pick it up and opened it slowly.

'Victor,
I'm sorry about last night. I hope everything went well at your meeting today.
Milieu'

Victor started to pour himself a cognac and paused before the glass was half full. He stood for a moment, introspectively, before carefully pouring the contents back into the cut crystal decanter, holding the glass in place until he was certain that each drop had been replaced. He poured himself a glass of plain seltzer water and slowly climbed the stairs to his study, where he began to open his bills and his bank statements.

I HAVE...
A FEW WORDS TO SAY.
AND THEN I WILL TAKE MY LEAVE OF YOU.
FOR I HAVE NO INTEREST IN THE ISSUE WHICH, HERE, CONSUMES YOUR ATTENTIONS
'GOD OR GODDESS'?
MANIFESTATIONS OF BOTH EXIST ALL AROUND YOU IN WAYS OBVIOUS TO EVEN THE SMALLEST CHILD
...
IT MAKES AS MUCH SENSE FOR YOU TO CONTEMPLATE THE EXECUTIVE MERITS OF COMPLIMENTARY NATURES
...TO DETERMINE WHICH, OF THE TWO, IS PREEMINENT
AS IT WOULD FOR A FLY ON MY WINDOWSILL TO QUESTION WHETHER IT WAS BETTER FOR ME TO MOVE MY BISHOP OR MY QUEEN IN A GAME OF CHESS
...
THE ONLY SENSIBLE LEADERSHIP -- THE ONLY EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP -- I HAVE FOUND, IS LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE
...

..TO CONDUCT ONE'S AFFAIRS IN SUCH A WAY THAT A UNIVERSAL IMITATION OF THAT CONDUCT WILL BRING ABOUT A GENERAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE HUMAN CONDITION
THAT, TO ME, IS THE SUM AND SUBSTANCE OF WISDOM
AND SO I WILL LEAVE HERE..
AND I BID THE THREE OF YOU TO DO LIKEWISE.
ABANDON THIS PLACE OF CRUSHING OPULENCE WHOSE VERY ARCHITECTURE SERVES TO INTIMIDATE AND DIMINISH THE HUMAN SPIRIT THAT IT SHOULD EMBRACE..
OPEN YOUR MINDS' EYES BUT SLIGHTLY
AND YOU WILL SEE THE TRUTH IN MY WORDS
IT IS.. UGLY
AND IT IS SHAMEFUL
IT... DEGRADES THAT WHICH IT PURPORTS TO EXALT...
THIS...PLACE...
...WHICH HAS STOOD AS A MONUMENT TO INSTITUTIONALIZED OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE
...
IN THE NAME OF TRANSITORY AND TEMPORAL POWER
SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL

ASTORIA
THE MOMENT YOU SET FOOT OUTSIDE THAT HOTEL... WITHOUT AN ENTOURAGE. WITHOUT AN ARMY..
WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A SINGLE BODYGUARD..
AT THAT MOMENT
YOU WERE TRULY FREE
HAD YOU WALKED AWAY FROM THERE - INTO THE LOWER CITY THERE TO LOSE YOURSELF AMONG THE MASSES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE...
YOU WOULD HAVE REMAINED FREE...
INSTEAD
INSTEAD YOU CAME HERE...
AND, IN SO DOING, YOU HAVE TRADED THE SPIRITUAL CAPTIVITY OF A POLITICAL FIGURE.
...FOR THE MORE WRETCHED IMPRISONMENT OF A WOULD-BE MESSIAH..

IT TOOK THE IMMINENCE OF CERTAIN DEATH TO MAKE YOU REALIZE THAT YOU DON'T DESIRE FOLLOWERS
A THRONE
UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE.
AND I ASK YOU NOW-- IN LIGHT OF YOUR NEW INSIGHT..
IF YOU PERSIST IN THE "FOLLY" OF THE ASCENSION WHICH WILL SOON TAKE PLACE...
WHAT OTHER RESULT COULD THERE BE?
WHAT OTHER RESULT COULD RATIONALLY BE HOPED FOR?
EXCEPT FOLLOWERS
A THRONE
AND UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE?
I
ONCE A PROFOUND TRUTH HAS BEEN SEEN..
IT CANNOT BE "UNSEEN"
THERE'S NO GOING BACK TO THE PERSON YOU WERE
EVEN IF SUCH A POSSIBILITY DID EXIST.
WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO?

THAT'S YOUR SOLUTION TO THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS PO?
THAT WE ALL SIT AROUND AND PLAY... CHESS?
I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT A MOTHER'S LIFE IS TOO BUSY FOR SUCH... TRIFLES
THE POPULATION BASE IS ENORMOUS CIRIN.
F. EVERYONE
EVERYONE..
DEVOTED A FEW HOURS A WEEK TO ASSISTING IN FARMING
WEAVING FABRICS...
SEWING CLOTHES
DISTRIBUTING FOOD AND CLOTHING
BUILDING HOMES AS THEY ARE NEEDED
WHAT ELSE WOULD BE REQUIRED?
FOR ME? CHESS.
FOR YOU? RAISING CHILDREN
FOR OTHERS? WRITING.. PAINTING.. SPORTS.. READING... DANCE.
ONE PERSON IS TRIFLE TO ANOTHER'S PASSION FOR LIVING...
CHESS ENRICHES MY LIFE..

I'M NOT ADMITTING TO SELF-INDULGENCE
I ADMIT NOTHING FREELY
WHY WON'T YOU ADMIT THAT IN AN OVER-POPULATED WORLD THE GREATEST SELF-INDULGENCE
VS CHILD-BIRTH
HAVE YOUR SMILE ON ME
BOTH CEREBUS AND [illegible] WE'RE [illegible] HE'S STEN, HE'S THEY AND [illegible]
CEREBUS HASN'T HEARD A WORD AFTER YOU TOLD HIM HE HAS US AT HIS MERCY
DAMN RIGHT-- CEREBUS COULD KILL YOU ALL IN A FEW SECONDS!
YOU SEE? [illegible] ABOUT [illegible] CHILDREN [illegible]
YES, JASTORIA

YOUR VIEWS ARE WELL-KNOWN TO US ALL. AS I HAVE SAID, I WILL BE SAYING SHORTLY
AT THAT POINT I AM SURE ALL THREE OF YOU WILL HAVE A GREAT DEAL TO DISCUSS.
I ASK ONLY THAT YOU PERMIT ME TO STATE MY VIEWS WITHOUT INTERRUPTION BEFORE MY DEPARTURE ...
FOR YOU TO INTERJECT THE OBSERVATION THAT CIRIN AND CERBERUS AREN'T CAPABLE OF LISTENING IS MORE THAN A
LOOK!.
ALL I WAS SAYING WAS
SORRY
GO AHEAD
THANK YOU
I'LL TRY TO BE BRIEF.
CIRIN...?

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Mr. Sim,

I have been reading your book for years . . . love it . . . etc., etc., but I am writing in response to a letter from one Kip Omolade, printed in issue #173. Kip mentioned being a graduate of SVA which, coincidentally, is where I am currently enrolled. He also mentioned having his own creation. If you read this, Kip, get in touch with me. I'd like to see some of your work.

Bryan Cox
The Greystone #829
212 W. 92nd St.
New York, NY
USA 10024

P.S. *Cerebus* is progressing wonderfully. I recently purchased a mint #1 for $50.00. (I was so pleased.) Keep up the great work! I look forward to seeing what you produce in the next 10 years.

Fifty bucks for a mint number one? That sound you hear is several thousand sets of molars grinding.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I'd like to share with you a couple of *Cerebus* conversations I have had recently, and a few thoughts.

1. There I am in my favorite comic shop, whining to the manager about the lack of *Cerebus* back-issues that I am missing, when a fellow fan pops into the conversation, mentioning that he likes *Cerebus* too. Now, I've talked with this guy before and I've never really found myself drawn towards him as a possible "friend" (he's obviously a fanboy, much younger than me, the type that thinks any book with an "X" on the cover is way cool and that the Punisher is not violent enough) but in spite of this I realize immediately that if he likes *Cerebus* his tastes cannot be altogether rancid, so we get to talking. We discuss, among other things, our favorite supporting characters, funny scenes, and plotlines, as well as the scarcity of certain issues and the effort required to complete our collections. And at one point he says to me, "I really want to get *Cerebus Zero*."

"That's not too tough to do," I say.

"Naah, they're all sold out," he replies.

"No, they're not. I bought one a couple of weeks ago. You can still find them around. Maybe not at this shop, but I know of two other shops nearby that still have some copies."

"Yeah? How much are they selling for?"

"Cover," I say.

"No Way!"

"Sure. Of course, they're second printings."

His face fell. He picked it up, screwed it back on and said, "Naah. I want a First Printing."

I was baffled. He was serious. "It's a reprint book!" I said.

"Yeah, so?"

I shook my head, perplexed. "Why is it so important to get a first printing of a reprint book?!"

"It's more valuable," he said, staring at me. His expression told me that he thought I must be brain-damaged. My expression was probably the same.

"Listen (you dimwit, I thought). If you want 'valuable' go out and buy the original first printings of the books that number Zero reprints. Those are what's valuable. Hey, have you seen *that* book . . ." I said, pointing at this week's new two-month-late *Image* number one. While he was distracted I managed to escape into another corner of the store. I should have stuck with my original perceptions of this guy. Moral: just because someone reads *Cerebus* and likes it (or Gaiman, or Ellison, or Ayn Rand, or William Shakespeare) doesn't mean that person's head is not lodged firmly up his butt. The two are not mutually exclusive.

2. Same shop, 2 weeks later. The assistant manager tells me that he is moving to a new position in the company, the current store manager will be co-manager with the manager from another store in the chain. Knowing that this is going to happen, the two managers have "raped" (his word) the other store of its hot books. Since I am a favored customer, would I like to look at the box of booty they came up with? Sure!

What do I find? Amongst other things, two copies of *Cerebus Zero*. "This is mine!" I declare, clutching one of the books. "Okay," he says.

"Hey, I know another customer who wants one of these," I mention.

"Oh yeah? Who?"

"Dunno his name. Blond kid, saw him in here a few weeks ago, we were talking about his book."

"Oh, him," the shopkeeper says. "He can't have it."

End of conversation. My immediate reaction: pleasure tinged with bitterness. Pleasure because this money-minded fanboy will not get the "valuable hot first-print" book he is looking for. Bitterness because a *Cerebus* fan is shut out. I can picture myself in his position, and I know how I would feel if I found out that the shop I frequent had cut me off without telling me. No one who wants *Cerebus* should be deprived, no matter how trivial his reason for wanting. No one who enjoys *Cerebus* should be shut out, no matter how rancid his other tastes may be. It's just not right.

Reflections after some time has passed. *Cerebus* (the book, not the character) seems to be the victim of a reverse snobbishness, which operates on several levels. Many comics fans who do not read *Cerebus* have an attitude that they are somehow above it, that it is an esoteric book that only has minimal appeal, that it is hard to follow and therefore not worth reading, that too much effort is required to understand the back history and that this is, somehow, a negative mark, a failure. To sum up the attitude in a statement: "*Cerebus* (the book) thinks it is better than me, therefore it is not good enough for me."

I believe this attitude is the main reason you do not have more readers. They think that you are too good for them, therefore you are not good enough. They pass you by, they will not spare the time, they will not make the effort.

They are fools. They do not realize the joy there is in reading this book, not just in the jokes, the funny scenes, the silly characters and the parodies, but in the intricate plotting, the tapestry of the story, the depth of the life this book chronicles. And the artwork! The artwork is to gasp at, to fall into and explore. It is not "work" to read this book, it is delight. If it takes hours to read, to absorb, to ponder and go back and re-read — these are hours spent in wonderment, laughter, and pain. Sure, sometimes it is puzzling. That's good! It's good because one knows that somewhere, sometime, just down the road a bit, around a corner, there will be the answer. And it will delight and amaze, and off you go to the storage box to dig out the issue where the question first came up, and the wonder and the laughter are new again, filled with a different meaning, seen in a new light.

"Don't stare at his ankle!" How many years before that made sense? And when it did, damned if I didn't go back and relive my first meeting with Weisshaupt — just after watching him die. Dave, the grand arc of your story captured in a microcosm. First meeting, a puzzle, a giggle. Last goodbye, an answer, a death. I was stunned, I was delighted, I was awed.

But — another reflection: we are snobs as well. My attitude towards this fellow fan is proof. He's a fanboy, I deride him, I insult his tastes. The shopkeeper decides he cannot have a book. Why? I don't know for certain (he did not explain, I did not ask) but I think the answer is that the shopkeeper, too, believes that this fan is not "good enough" for *Cerebus*. That this book should be kept until some more deserving reader wanders in.

Who is he (who are we) to make these value judgements? Everyone should be allowed to read anything they want to read, and no one should have the right or power to keep another from it. I am tempted — in fact, I will dammit! — to buy this other copy and give it to this fan. The shopkeeper be damned, *Cerebus* is here for everyone to enjoy!

Anti-*Cerebus* snobs beware! Just because you are not good enough for *Cerebus* does not mean *Cerebus* is too good for you. It's just good enough. And if you give it a try, it gets even better. And so will you.

Tomorrow, I go out into the world as a *Cerebus* Witness. And, Dave, if I don't get locked up I'm gonna snag you a few more readers. Crank up the presses, the walls are gonna fall!

Best,

Scott Lawrence
77 Middlesex Avenue
Reading, MA
USA 01867

P.S. Some of my examples may seem a bit out of date — i.e. Weisshaupt's death. In my last letter, you'll remember, I told you how I went back and bought all the first printings and reprints I could find and started at the beginning. I'm up to issue 112/113. I'm pacing myself a bit, because I know that at some point I will catch up to you, and then the month-long wait will begin. I dread that day. My next letter will detail my reactions to *Church and State* — but you probably have a hint of how I feel based on a few of the previous paragraphs.

P.P.S. My letters are not an attempt to get published in Aardvark Comment, although they are addressed to the lettercol. I'm more interested in letting *you* know how I feel about your work than letting other readers know. Besides, if they read *Cerebus* they probably share many of the same feelings anyway, so what would be the point?

Interesting theory. I would really prefer that you not go door-to-door early Sunday morning, but if you can turn up an extra reader or two, well, hey, much obliged.

Oh, and *Cerebus Zero* has only *had* one printing.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

This month's pick to click: *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* by Roberto Calasso (trust me, it'll take about a month to read it).

Issue #171 was the first I've unqualifiedly enjoyed for quite some time, although it raised plenty more questions and few answers are in sight. I think it takes considerable chutzpah to be sarcastic to one's own hallucination, something even I have never quite managed.

Not to be outdone in the pretentious quotation department, my current personal favorite comes from Tom Sharpe's novel, *The Great Pursuit*: "In addition they seemed to spend a great deal of time eating and drinking and going to parties, and Frensic, whose appearance tended to limit his sensual pleasures to putting things into himself rather than into other people, was something of a gourmet." Okay, maybe Tom Sharpe doesn't quite compare to Tom Hardy, but it far more fits my personal autobiography. You ought to congratulate me — I've managed to get stood up by three women in a single week — not bad! When I was back home in the States, I had to really work hard to achieve the same level of ill-treatment. Well, I'm going for a clear decade of celibacy.

I don't think even the self-righteously indignant Trina Robbins would recognise your description of feminism, Dave. You're confusing criticism (albeit, occasionally shrill, humourless criticism) with a demand for censorship. There are of course Andrea Dworkins out there but I really believe that even within the feminist community they are neither moral nor a majority, despite the impression they sometimes give in their role as darlings of the media. There is a great deal of feminist criticism of mainstream porn which has as its goal not the eradication of sexual images but the creation of images more women will find sexy. That's a capitalist ploy, Dave, something you ought to be all in favor of.

I really love that double ankh in ivy design, and thought of having them tatooed on one of my shoulder blades, but decided it would give the wrong religious/political message. Maybe next time.

Fiki-Fiki Boogly Boogly,

Mikel Norwitz
10 Osborn Close
London E8

P.S. My first comic was a Kirby *Mister Miracle.*

I think as long as they label the pornography 'Politically Correct: Not Likely to Arouse a Single Male' that's fine with me. The only capitalist ploys I'm in favour of are the ones which will help cartoonists to put food on their

table and a roof over their head by self-publishing.

A full decade? That's pretty impressive. The best I managed was two years and two months (May 1989 to July 1991).

★★★★★★★★★★★★

(With apologies to Lou Reed):

Todd did nine -'til-five
For a big company
Drew platinum crap
For a work-for-hire fee
Looked to Vanaheim
Yearned to be free
Hung up his web shooter so
He was an Indy.
He said
"Hey Dave,
Thanks for the aardvark."
He said
"Hey Gerhard,
Thanks for the aardvark."
And the Cirinists say
Do do do do do
Do do do do do do do do
Do do do do do do do do
Do do do do do do do . . .

Alan was morose
'Cause he was a Moore
Looking out of the shadows
Couldn't take any more
"Quis custodiet
Ipsos bank fee?"
Now it's: "Excalibur,
Nineteen–Sixty–Three!"
He said (High voice)
"Hey Dave, When you're standing in shit
Thanks for
the aardvark." You just walk away...
He said
"Hey Gerhard, When you're standing in shit
Thanks for
the aardvark." You just walk away...
And the Kevillists say
Do do do do do . . .

Wendy and Richard
Out in the sands
Alone, all alone
(Except for their fans)
After fifteen long years
They've reached a new holt
But who was there first
To start the revolt?
They said (High voice)
"Hey Dave, Howl . . .
Thanks for the aardvark."
They said
"Hey Gerhard, Howl . . .
Thanks for the aardvark."
And the wolfriders say
Do do do do do . . .

Neil's still at it
with an Endless stream
Will they let him survive
Or will they kill his Dream?
But should he feel
That there's no breathing room
He'll go out to 'The Country'
And laugh over Swoon
(And then)
He'll say:
"Hey Dave,
Thanks for the aardvark."
He'll say:
"Hey Gerhard,
Thanks for the aardvark."
And the Endless say
Do do do do do . . .

This song is for Jack
For Jerry and Joe
For Wein and for Byrne
And for others you know
For Claremont and Sinnott
And all these forgotten
By the corporate machine
That they have begotten
But it's NOT for Stan
Or Fabe or Scott
You've sold out your talent
Now you're peddling rot
But the fans have a choice
(Though you'd rather we'd not)
As far as I'm concerned,
You should ALL BE SHOT!!!
I'll say
"Hey Dave,
Thanks for the aardvark."
I'll say
"Hey Gerhard,
Thanks for the aardvark."
And the publishers say
Don't don't don't don't don't . . .
(Bob '93)

Robert HD Ahrens
14/1 Lauder Road
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH9 2EL

I've hung onto this one for about five months now. It just seemed too self-serving to print, but then I foolishly promised that I would print it at the Edinburgh stop on the UK Tour. Forgive me, everyone.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim, or Dave (or whatever you like to be called),

Cerebus is great. I mean, it seems like sort of a corny way to start a letter, but, I mean, it's great.

Cerebus (the comic book, the character) is just your creation, right? I mean, shouldn't I be giving you an erection by saying that *you're* great instead of it (and I'm referring to the character this time)?

Oh, well; it doesn't matter. I like the stories in your comic (even though sometimes I just skip the stories and go on to the letters page) and it seems as if I agree with Jeff Dobson in issue #145; your stories have changed a lot since the beginning.

I found it hard to describe your earlier stories; but the plot line for *Melmoth* (for example [cool]) is sort of like one of those afternoons (when you're home from school) and you're standing on the couch and you lose your balance (and you fall through this hole [and you start to turn around and you get dizzy {and you try to turn around the other way}]) and you start making run-on sentences and other grammatical errors (and you fall off the couch [because you were on the couch the whole time]).

Otherwise, I think that the book is great, and if *Church and State* doesn't become cheaper soon I'm going to have to do something drastic.

Driving to Oregon is very, very hard.

Will Weisser
305 W. 98th St. #7C-S
New York, NY
USA 10025

P.S. If you can't find the relevance in the last sentence, look very, very closely.

Actually, I'm about as ordinary as they come. Glad you like *Cerebus* (the comic book and the character) and that you know the difference between Cerebus and me.

La dernière phrase: Oui. Dur. Très dur.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Where to begin? I've been reading *Cerebus* for, oh, ever . . . I found it by accident years ago, got hooked, and here I am today still hooked on the book. Yours is the only book that I have made certain to pick up over the last 15 years of my involvement in comics. Other books have come and gone, the overall size of my interest and collection has waxed and waned, but 'most holy' is still *my* Pope.

For all this time I have been content to enjoy the stories, the art, and the letters without writing you since others have been so able to express points that I too felt. I read, and agreed so many times that I felt writing in to say 'Amen!' was redundant. And you are, after all, a busy man.

Today, though I'm still loath to

waste your time, I thought I'd drop a line and kill two birds with one stone; first, to you Dave, heartfelt thanks, and congratulations on making *Cerebus* an experience for us the readers. We love the book, and you, for not talking down to us.

Second, and I hope this is received in the spirit that it is intended to be; it's time to share the experience. I am faced with a space/storage problem, and since I have to do something about it I thought I'd make the other *Cerebus* readers the offer: Issues 26 through 162 (which takes us up through *Flight*, the most recent published collection) are on the block. Don't get me wrong, I'm not giving up! I'm staying the distance, but I can't keep both the individual issues *and* the phone books *and* have a place to sleep . . . so I'm keeping the phone books and current issues, but relinquishing the individual issues.

Any interested parties should write to me at the address below with their offers. I'd prefer to sell the lot as a package, but I'll keep an open mind on that. As far as prices go, I'll keep an open mind there, too. I'm more concerned that the collection find a good home than I am in making oodles of profit.

Anyway, Dave, thanks. For the fun, the excitement, and the little gray guy. Oh, and Lord Julius. And the rest of 'em, too.

John Hutchins
403 Roy St. #12
Seattle, WA
USA 98109

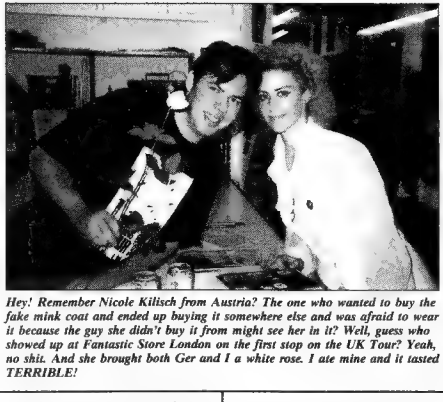
P.S. Damn, almost forgot! GERHARD! You're INCREDIBLE! Thanks!

Say, this just might start a trend in Aardvark Comment that will really piss off the purists!

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I'm writing kinda sorta in response to Daniel Livingstone's missive in issue #174. Well not exactly, but his letter inspired mine, so what the heck. I think much of the anger and confusion that inevitably results when someone starts talking about the problems created by the matriarchy, and feminists (the two aren't quite the same, though they are related), and matriarchal power throughout the history of Western civilization is, oddly enough, because people



Hey! Remember Nicole Killisch from Austria? The one who wanted to buy the fake mink coat and ended up buying it somewhere else and was afraid to wear it because the guy she didn't buy it from might see her in it? Well, guess who showed up at Fantastic Store London on the first stop on the UK Tour? Yeah, no shit. And she brought both Ger and I a white rose. I ate mine and it tasted TERRIBLE!

continue to look at things from a male point of view. And the ones most guilty of viewing the world in stereotypically male fashion are the feminists themselves.

As someone who was a feminist himself for many years, but who finally grew up, I think I understand this thinking very well.

Look: our society values victims. We have for some time. I don't really know when this started, but it was probably with Christianity. Regardless, this trait is one of the most endearing, if at times maddening, things about Western Civilization (a civilization I am, by the way, enormously proud to be a member of). It is also, as Dinesh D'Souza observed in *Illiberal Education*, a rather unique trait of the West. In most of the world, victims of violence, poverty, disease, starvation, oppression, and other maladies all too common to the human condition are regarded with varying degrees of contempt, scorn and derision. The best — the BEST — they can hope for is a certain amount of pity.

In our society, with only occasional exceptions, we exhalt victims, are humbled by them. We also generally despise people who are seen as having power. Thus anyone who can be seen as a victim is automatically better than his fellows. Victims in groups who can claim oppression for their group therefore have an enormous supply of social and political capital, which they use to demand "compensation" from society, or by which to rationalize any questionable actions they may take or statements they may make.

This explains why so many feminists hate your guts, Dave, though they probably aren't conscious of it. Any implication that men have been victims would give men status; any implication that women aren't victims is an assault on feminist power and special status. If women can't be portrayed as perpetual losers and men can't be portrayed as perpetual winners, then feminists would have to (horror of horrors) lose their self-righteous attitudes.

The funny thing in all this to me is that feminists gain status in our society by portraying their mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers, and women throughout history (not to mention any modern women uninterested in toeing the feminist line, of which there are many), as pitiful, weak, and helpless victims unable to throw off the shackles of oppression until midway through the 20th Century.

One wonders if that's the way most women throughout history would really want to be portrayed by their late 20th Century "sisters." One wonders if the countless strong, proud female members of civilization throughout the last few thousand years would really appreciate being thought of in that manner. Yet feminists don't even think twice about portraying the women of history this way, just so they can turn around and "prove" their own status as victims.

My own view of women throughout history is that women have always shared an equal part in the shaping of society and in setting its directions. The notion that just because men and women have taken on different roles, and that men have most frequently been in society's "leadership" positions (a highly overrated position with far less power than we generally think) in no way diminishes the enormous power and special status women have always held in society.

So when I read someone who is angered by the suggestion that "Feminists/Matriarchists" are behind censorship, I'm hardly surprised, though I am saddened.

Jeez, of COURSE it's mostly women behind things like this; a society totally bereft of women would surely have almost no moral standards against pornography at all, let alone laws against it. That certain males wind up being the ones to carry out society's will in these matters is supposed to prove that women have nothing to do with it? Perhaps if one is given to looking at the world in a superficial, male-oriented manner, that seems so. But anyone who looks deeper will see that such men are the instruments of someone else's will, not the creators of it.

The view that the overwhelming majority of cops, judges, and lawmakers are men proves that women have little power IS an inherently male chauvinist point of view, you know. It's also one trapped in male lines of thinking. For it presumes that what is visible and that those things where men can be found are where the power in our society lies . . . rather like any boy deciding that just because he's bigger and stronger than a girl, he's better and more powerful than she is. And it's nonsense.

(To go off on a minor tangent, it's also worth noting that the vast majority of men never become judges, politicians, cops, corporate executives, kings, and etc. anyway).

Women have an enormous amount of power in our society and ALWAYS HAVE; that this power is less obvious and visible in no way trivializes it or makes it one iota less real and important. In fact, to deny the enormous power and influence of females in our society throughout history is a far greater trivialization of women than anything your average male chauvinist has ever said or thought.

Well anyway, to change the subject a little, Dave, have you ever noticed how hypocritical feminists get over the issue of the differences in male and female behavior?

For example, notice how if in a context where you're talking about business, a man says that women are less competitive than men, and are thus at a disadvantage when competing with men in certain occupations, a feminist will invariably attack him. On the other hand, in a context where you're talking about violent crime, if a feminist were to say that women are less aggressive and domineering than men, she will have made a statement that most feminists would applaud. Yet ultimately, the two statements are no different, except that one is given in a negative context and the other in a positive one. If it's called "competitive," which is a good thing in many contexts, then of course women are every bit as good as men, but if it's called "aggressive," well that's a negative thing so of course women aren't as bad as men.

If you ask them if they think women are better than men, they immediately deny it. Yet any time you come to any specific at all, women are better. Negative statements about men are accepted, negative statements about women are not. About the only thing you can get them to admit is that men are bigger and hairier than women, and even then maybe not.

There's nothing new in all this; if you make positive generalizations about people based on their race, or religion, or sex, or whatever, they don't much mind. But make exactly the same generalization in a negative context, and oh, watch the feathers fly!

I'm not particularly comfortable with such generalizations, but I'm even more uncomfortable with hypocrisy. I am no less comfortable with people who say that Jews are an intelligent, learned people who like to be leaders in society than I am with people who say Jews make great lawyers. There is very little difference between the two statements except that one is meant to be complimentary while the other is neutral or even slightly derogatory . . . but both are careless stereotypes, and regardless of the grain of truth they might (might) possibly hold, they in no way apply to every individual. And anyway, who gives a shit?

I'll never forget gettting into an argument with a woman who was totally offended by the portrayal of the Cirinists in *Cerebus.* When pressed, of course she agreed that women were no better than men and of course she agreed that women could do anything men could and of course she agreed that women could be just as aggressive and strong as men.

So why then should she be offended when women in power are portrayed as doing all the same sorts of nasty things men have done throughout history when in power? She never did give a coherent answer. Neither did anyone who agreed with her. Be assured, however, that it was clear to any right-thinking, intelligent person that Dave Sim evinced hostility toward women in his writing because he had a problem with feminists and a problem with the way women sometimes act toward men, and he portrayed Cirinists as evil.

Whenever a feminist pulls the "you seem hostile toward women" line on me, I know I've backed her (or him) into a corner. It's one of the oldest tricks in the book; when you can no longer effectively attack a person's ideas, you attack him personally instead.

I think many feminist ideas are wrong, stupid, arrogant and/or contemptible . . . and any time I say so, some people just "know" I have "hostility toward women." (News flash, kids, it's not women I have a problem with, it's raving, cant-spouting cretins and bigoted pinheads. If I treated female cant-spouting cretins any different than I treat male cant-spouting cretins you might have a case . . . but I don't, so you don't. Obnoxious and overopinionated I may be at times, but bigoted I am not.)

Well. Where did all that come from? Oh, never mind.

Hey, *Cerebus* is great.

By the way, in all this stuff about self-publishing you've written, have you ever addressed the nuts-and-bolts of actually getting your work printed and distributed? See, I'm thinking about it, but, like, where do you go to get the stuff printed up? I mean, is there a particularly good type of printer to go to? Or a particularly bad type? Do you just pick up the Yellow Pages and look under "Printers" and hope for the best? Or what?

And once you're printed, do you

start by talking to comics retailers in your area, or do you try to find distributors, or what?

If you already did talk about this, never mind, except I'd like to know where so's I can go find it.

By the way, Dave, check out *Blind Melon.* Also, by the way, fuck what anyone else says, *Stone Temple Pilots* kick!

Shalom,

Dean Esmay
824 1/2 Texas Ave.
Shreveport, LA
USA 71101

P.S. Not that it has anything much to do with the things discussed in this letter, but I'm enclosing a cool article by William Tucker called "Monogamy and Its Discontents" that appeared in the October *National Review.* Though his central point about "Family Values" was interesting, I found the general discussion of the nature of polygamy and monogamy, and its effects on men and women, was interesting in and of itself. I think the guy's a bit off with parts of it, but there are some interesting points in there too, many of which I'd thought of myself but never put down on paper so well. I hope you enjoy it (or even have time to read it). Cheers!

I find it especially eerie that those inherent contradictions have been right there in front of us for more than two decades but it is only in the last three years that anyone has mentioned anything about them. I remember this feeling of imminent doom when I first wrote 'I am not a feminist' in the Note from the President. How did it stay so unassailable for two fucking decades? Misguided chivalry? Mass hypnosis? Like I said, eerie.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I was just staring at the back of issue #174 (just because I have nothing better to do).

Why do you have more hair on your right arm than on your left?

Sincerely,

Eddie Blackledge
Portland, Oregon
USA 97220

P.S. Where the hell is Rush Limbaugh Roach!?!

By the time I was done getting the implants in my right arm, I just couldn't face the agony again, no matter how 'macho' it looked.

★★★★★★★★★★

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Convention Center

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Radisson Hotel

CEREBUS BACK ISSUES

All prices quoted are in Canadian funds.

$5.00 each	CEREBUS 89, 91, 97, 98, 101, 103, 111, 112–113
$4.00 each	CEREBUS 114, 115, 117–123, 125–136
$3.50 each	CEREBUS 139–146, 148–150, 152
$3.00 each	CEREBUS 156–162, 166–176
$3.00 each	(2nd Printings) CEREBUS 151, 152, 163, 164, 165
$2.75	CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
$8.00	DIAMONDBACK CARDS (1992)
$1.00 each	CEREBUS BI-WEEKLY 1–4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14–20
	HIGH SOCIETY BI-WEEKLY 1–3, 6–17, 19–26
	CHURCH & STATE BI-WEEKLY 1–11, 13, 15–21, 23, 25–30

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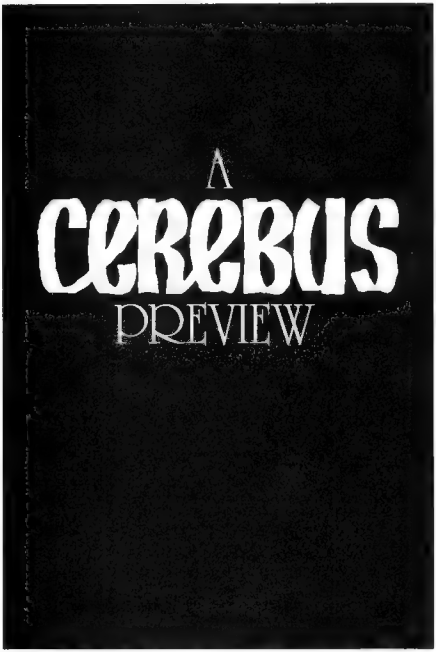
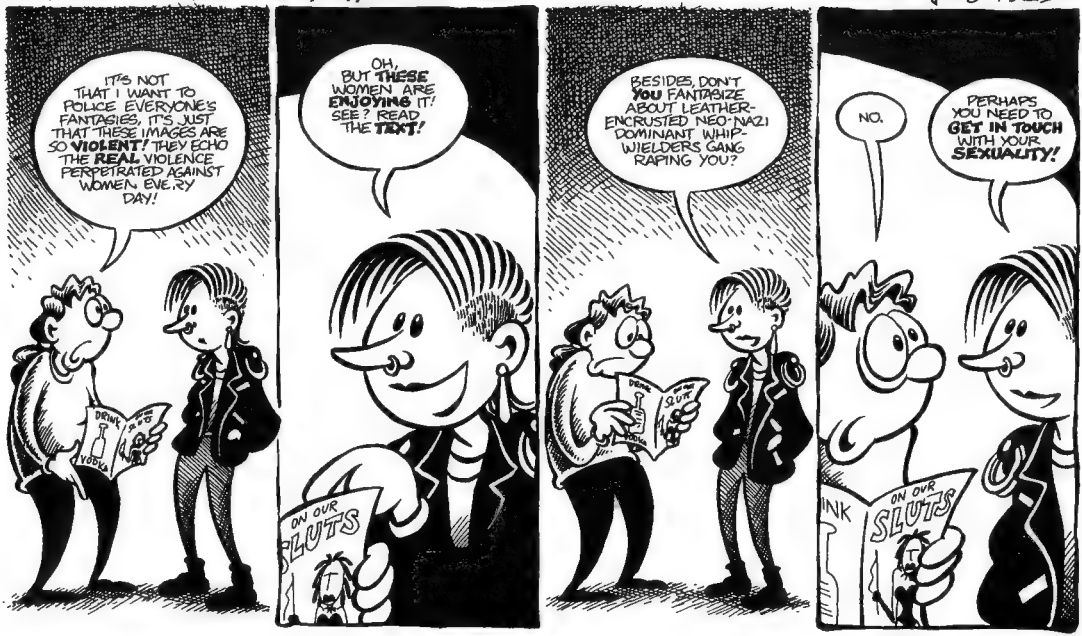


I met Nina Paley while I was wandering through Artists' Alley at Wondercon earlier this year. I had already read her comic book which was up for a humour award in the Eisners and had found her to be one of those rarest of God's creatures: a funny feminist. I bought some of her postcards and her collection of self-published (yay!) newspaper strips and gave her some money to put a sketch in it. After I read the book, I offered to do a Preview in *Cerebus*. Nina, I don't think, had ever heard of *Cerebus* — which was a blessing in disguise, since she only distrusted me as a male instead of actively despising me for being Dave Sim. Anyway, Diana Schutz told her that doing a *Cerebus* Preview would be a good idea (diplomatically avoiding telling her anything about me or the book). I heartily recommend that you send check, cash, money order or whatever for (I don't have the book in front of me, so let's say) ten dollars and Nina will send you her book and some mini-comics and postcards and stuff. They're really good.

Nina Paley, P.O. Box 460736, San Francisco, CA 94146

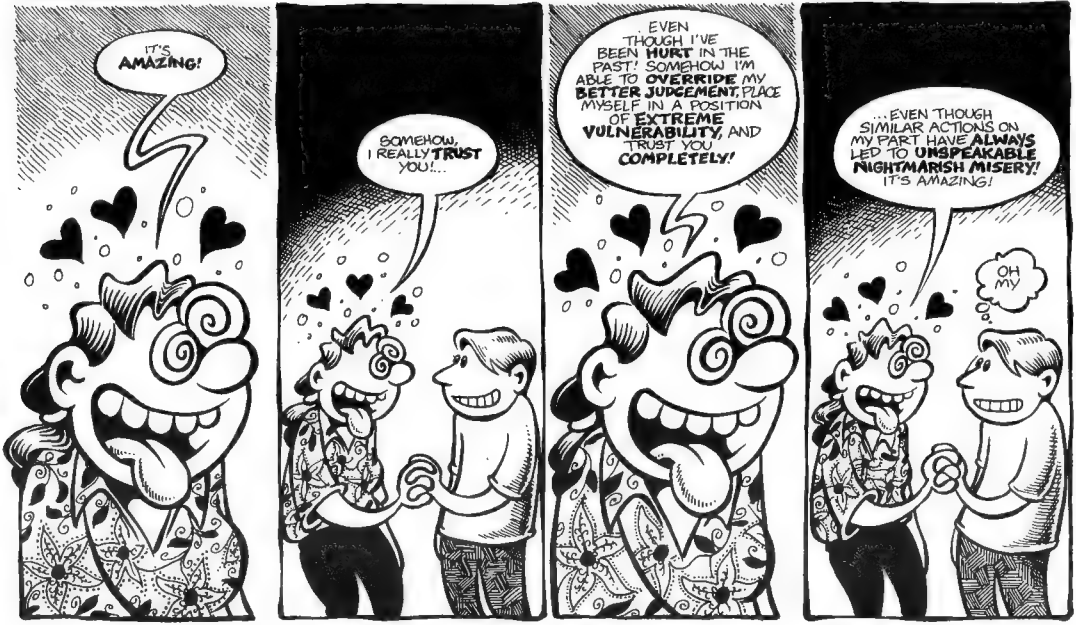

NINA'S ADVENTURES in hip, happenin' San Francisco
10·5·92 © Nuza Pakula
IT'S NOT THAT I WANT TO POLICE EVERYONE'S FANTASIES, IT'S JUST THAT THESE IMAGES ARE SO VIOLENT! THEY ECHO THE REAL VIOLENCE PERPETRATED AGAINST WOMEN EVERY DAY!
DRINK
VODKA
OH, BUT THESE WOMEN ARE ENJOYING IT! SEE? READ THE TEXT!
ON OUR SLUTS
BESIDES, DON'T YOU FANTABIZE ABOUT LEATHER-ENCRUSTED NEO-NAZI DOMINANT WHIP-WIELDERS GANG RAPING YOU?
NO.
PERHAPS YOU NEED TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR SEXUALITY!

nina's adventures

©Nina Paley 1/1/92
HI MOM! GUESS WHAT? I PLACED A PERSONAL AD!
YOU WHAT?!
OH, C'MON. IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL OUT HERE. EVERYBODY DOES IT.
GOD. I DON'T ENVY YOU YOUNG SINGLE PEOPLE TODAY.
WELL, REST ASSURED, NONE OF THEM TRIED TO AXE-MURDER ME.
GREAT. THAT'S REALLY REASSURING.
BUT ONE OF THEM WAS A BONA FIDE MENTAL HOSPITAL ESCAPEE. *
WHAT?!
YEAH! HE WAS CUTE, TOO!
HEY, IS THAT THE TIME? GOTTA GO!
WHAT?! WAIT!!
I HOPE I NEVER HAVE KIDS.
CLICK!

*IT'S TRUE, TOO! I'M NOT MAKING THIS UP!

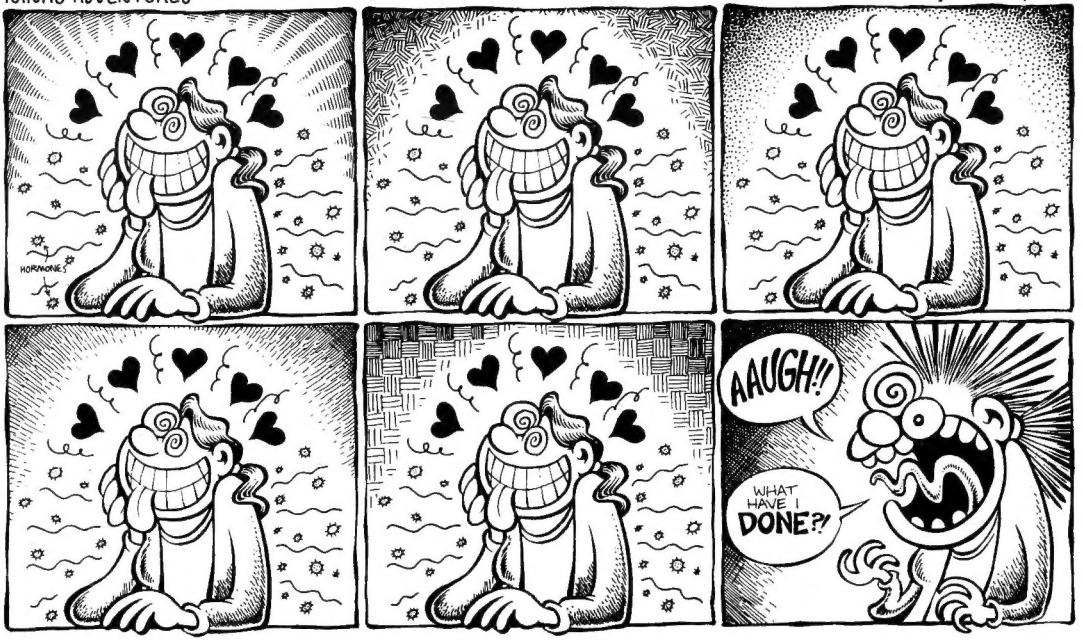
©Nina Paley 10-28-92


IT'S AMAZING!
SOMEHOW, I REALLY TRUST YOU!...
EVEN THOUGH I'VE BEEN HURT IN THE PAST! SOMEHOW I'M ABLE TO OVERRIDE MY BETTER JUDGEMENT, PLACE MYSELF IN A POSITION OF EXTREME VULNERABILITY, AND TRUST YOU COMPLETELY!
...EVEN THOUGH SIMILAR ACTIONS ON MY PART HAVE ALWAYS LED TO UNSPEAKABLE NIGHTMARISH MISERY! IT'S AMAZING!
OH MY

NINA'S ADVENTURES

Hormone Withdrawal

11-5-92 ©Nina Paley



NINA'S AD-VENTURES
"THE KIND MEN LIKE!"
PRESENTS
HAVE A "RELATIONSHIP" WITH NINA™!
"PORNOGRAPHY FOR THE INTELLECT!"
GRAB A PENCIL!!
A READER-PARTICIPATION COMIC BY
NINA©PALEY '84
YOU SAY I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO REALLY UNDERSTANDS YOU?
YOU CAN RELATE TO ME BETTER THAN ANYONE YOU KNOW?
WHY, (YOUR NAME HERE)! I FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT YOU!
REALLY? REALLY?
YOU TOO!
I'M FLATTERED!
GOSH!
BLUSH!
OH, (YOUR NAME HERE)!
SEX?
SURE!
I'D LOVE TO HAVE SEX WITH YOU, (YOUR NAME HERE)!
FUMBLE FUMBLE
HEY (YOUR NAME HERE)! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!
WHAT HAPPENED?
BUT YOU JUST SAID YOU WANTED ME!
@★!!#! MADONNA-WHORE COMPLEX!
STEAM! FUME!
WHAT AM I DOING? I'M DRAWING A PICTURE OF YOUR PENIS TO PUBLISH FOR THOUSANDS TO SEE!
LOOK EVERYONE! IT'S (YOUR NAME HERE)'S LIMP, FLACCID PENIS!!
YEAH, ACTUAL SIZE!!
HA HA HA!

THIS COMIC IS DEDICATED TO (YOUR NAME HERE). THANKS FOR BEING SUCH A GOOD SPORT, HON!

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PHOTOS BY GHERHARD AND GHERARD'S CAMERA

STEPHEN HOLLAND (WHO IS SULKING BECAUSE HE JUST FELL DOWN THE STEPS AND IS HAVING A 'BAD HAIR DAY') AND I ENJOY A LOCAL NOTTINGHAM PUB, GERHARD AND MARK SIMPSON WAX FIGURES COURTESY MADAME TOUSSAUD'S (LONDON)